

Message Text

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71

ACTION EUR-25

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R 121605Z JUL 74

FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4125

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 4434

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOCI, GR

SUBJECT: SERAPHIM MOVES AGAINST OPPONENTS

1. SUMMARY. IN EMPHATIC NATIONAL TV AND RADIO ADDRESS JULY 11 ARCHBISHOP SERAPHIM DENOUNCED "HIGH ECCLESIASTICAL TREASON" COMMITTED BY "DARK FORCES WHO OPPOSE PACIFICATION OF CHURCH." HE THREATENED PRIVATE RELIGIOUS REFORM GROUPS, PRESUMABLY ZOI AND STOIR, WITH LEGAL SANCTIONS UNLESS THEY CONFORM TO PRESENT CHURCH ADMINISTRATION'S DESIRE FOR HARMONY. RADIO AND TV BULLETIN FOLLOWED ADDRESS WITH REPORT THAT NINE MORE IERONYMIST BISHOPS WERE REMOVED FROM OFFICE EARLIER IN DAY OF JULY 11. END SUMMARY.

2. ARCHBISHOP SERAPHIM WHO WAS ELECTED AT INSTIGATION OF PRESENT MILITARY REGIME IN JANUARY TOOK MAJOR STEP TOWARD CONSOLIDATING POWER JULY 11 WHEN BISHOPS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN PRESENT HEIRARCHY VOTED TO OUST NINE OTHER BISHOPS, WHO THUS JOIN THREE BISHOPS EARLIER REMOVED.. BISHOP LEONIDAS OF THESSALONIKI WAS AMONG THOSE REMOVED AND VOTING IN THIS INSTANCE -- TWENTY-NINE FOR REMOVAL, SEVEN FOR RETENTION -- WAS
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TYPICAL OFF ALL NINE ACTIONS. (COMMENT: SERAPHIM HAS BEEN

GOVERNING FOR PAST SIX MONTHS WITH MINORITY IN CHURCH HIERARCHY OF SEVENTY-TWO BISHOPS. HE WILL OBTAIN THEORETICAL ABSOLUTE MAJORITY WITH REPLACEMENTS AND NEW POSITIONS CREATED DURING HIS TENURE.)

3. OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT HIERARCHY HAD VOTED TO RETAIN IN OFFICE NINE OTHER IERONYMIST BISHOPS WHO HAD SOUGHT AND RECEIVED PARDON FOR THEIR IRREGULAR APPOINTMENTS BY FORMER ARCHBISHOP IERONYMOS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN HIS RULE. STATUS OF TEN OTHER BISHOPS ARE TO BE REVIEWED LATER BY HIERARCHY.

4. IN HIS SECOND NATIONAL ADDRESS SINCE TAKING OFFICE, SERAPHIM DID NOT MENTION THE ACTIONS TAKEN EARLIER IN THE DAY AGAINST HIS OPPONENTS BUT RATHER SOUGHT IN A FIFTEEN MINUTE TALK AT PRIME TV TIME 10:00 P.M. TO EXPLAIN BACKGROUND OF STRUGGLE. ARCHBISHOP SAID HE TOOK OFFICE AND WAS GIVEN EXTRAORDINARY POWERS IN CONSTITUENT ACT NO. 3 IN ORDER TO REGUALRIZE AN UNCANONICAL AND SELF-SERVING HIERARCHY. HE SAID THAT HE SOUGHT TO BE A LEADER OF RECONCILIATION AND ALLOWED IERONYMOS TO RETAIN HIS HONORIFIC TITLE IN RETIRMENT EVEN THOUGH SERAPHIM CONSIDERED HIMSELF TO BE THE SUCCESSOR TO ARCHBISHOP CHRYSOSTOMOS WHOM IERONYMOS ILLEGALLY OUSTED.

5. IN ADDRESS SERAPHIM WAS SHORT ON SPECIFIC CHARGES AGAINST IERONYMOS GROUP EXCEPT THAT THESE BISHOPS "DISTURBED RELATIONS/ WITH PHANAR. SERAPHIM BASED MUCH OF SPEECH UPON THESES OF CLIMATE OF CONSPIRACY IN WHICH SOME BISHOPS AND REFORM GROUPS SUCH AS ZOI AND SOTIR OPERATED. ALTHOUGH ALL GREEK PAPERS TREATED ARCHBISHOP'S "TREASON" THEME IN LEAD HEADLINES, PRO-GOG ACROPOLIS AND SENSATIONALIST-INCLINED APOVEVMATINI SINGLED OUT ALLEGATION ABOUT SUB-ROSA POLITICAL GROUP AS CHIEF EVIDENCE OF CONSPIRACY.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH OFFICIAL EXCUSE FOR NEW CHURCH ADMINISTRATION WAS CANONICAL CONFUSION OVER LEGITIMACY
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OF BISHOPS, THE PURGE UNDER WAY IS PRIMARILY POLITICAL. BISHOPS ARE BEING RETAINED OR RELEASED SOLELY ON GROUNDS OF WHETHER THEY WILLING TO CONFORM IN VIEW TO NEW CHURCH LEADERSHIP. THE HARSH INFERENTIAL ATTACKS UPON ZOI AND SOTIR, WHOSE NATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS INCLUDE IERONYMOS AND FORMER DEPUTY PM PATTAKOS AND WHOSE ADMIRERS AND REPORTEDLY NUMEROUS IN GOVERNMENT AND ACADEMIC CIRCLES, SUGGEST GRAVE

INSECURITY OF PRESENT CHURCH LEADER AND, POSSIBLY,
OF HIS MILITARY SPONSORS. MORALE IS LOW AT THE PARISH
LEVEL WHERE POPULAR FEELING IS ALREADY TENDING TO
CYNICAL VIEW THAT ONE FACTION - DRAWN CHIEFLY FROM THE
PELOPONESSUS, WITH SOME INTELLECTUAL PRETENSIONS, AND
WITH MILITARY SPONSORS - HAS BEEN EXCHANGED FOR ANOTHER
GROUP - DRAWN PRIMARILY FROM THE EPIRUS, AND BUTTRESSED
BY ANOTHER MILITARY SPONSORSHIP.
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